

# *Documents on Diplomacy: The Source*

## *John Adams' Journal of the Peace Negotiations* *November 30, 1782*

**W**e met first at Mr. Jay's, then at Mr. Oswald's; examined and compared the treaties. Mr. Strachey had left out the limitation of time, the twelve months, that the refugees were allowed to reside in America, its order to recover their estates, if they could. Dr. Franklin said this was a surprise upon us. Mr. Jay said so too. We never had consented to leave it out, and they insisted upon putting it in, which was done. \* \* \*

Mr. Laurens said there ought to be a stipulation that the British troops should carry off no negroes or other American property. We all agreed. Mr. Oswald consented.

Then the treaties were signed, sealed, and delivered, and we all went Out to Passy to dine with Dr. Franklin. Thus far has proceeded this great affair. The unravelling of the plot has been to me the most affecting and astonishing part of the whole piece.

As Soon as I arrived in Paris I waited on Mr. Jay, and learned from him the rise and progress of the negotiations. Nothing that has happened since the beginning of the controversy in 1761 has ever struck me more forcibly, or affected me more intimately, than that entire coincidence of principles and opinions between him and me. In about three days I went out to Passy, and spent the evening with Dr. Franklin, and entered largely into conversation with him upon the course and Present state of our foreign affairs. I told him, without reserve, my Opinion of the policy of this court, and of the principles, wisdom, and firmness with which Mr. Jay had conducted the negotiation in his sickness and my absence, and that I was determined to support Mr. Jay to the utmost of my power in the pursuit of the same system. The Doctor heard me patiently, but said nothing.

The first conference we had afterwards with Mr. Oswald. In considering one point and another, Dr. Franklin turned to Mr. Jay and said: "I am of your opinion, and will go on with these gentlemen in the business without consulting this court". He accordingly met with us in most of our conferences, and has gone with us in entire harmony and unanimity throughout, and has been able and useful, both by his sagacity and his reputation, in the whole negotiation.

I was very happy that Mr. Laurens came in, although it was the last day of the conferences, and wish he could have been sooner. His apprehension, notwithstanding his deplorable affliction under

the recent loss of so excellent a son, is as quick, his judgment as sound, and his heart as firm as ever. He had an opportunity of examining the whole, and judging and approving; and the article which he caused to be inserted at the very last, that no property should be carried off—which would most probably, in the multiplicity and hurry of affairs, have escaped us—was worth a longer journey, if that had been all. But his name and weight is added, which is of much greater consequence. These miserable minutes may help me to recollect, but I have not found time, amidst the hurry of business and crowd of visits, to make a detail.

I should have before noted that, at our first conference about the fishery, I related the facts as well as I understood them; but involving knowing myself but as a hearsay witness, I found it had not the weight of ocular testimony; to supply which defect I asked Dr. Franklin if Mr. Williams, of Nantes, could not give us light. He said Mr. Williams was on the road to Paris, and as soon as he arrived he would ask him. In a few days Mr. Williams called on me, and said Dr. Franklin had, as I desired him, inquired of him about the fishery, but he was not able to speak particularly upon that subject; but there was at Nantes a gentleman of Marblehead, Mr. Samuel White, son in-law to Mr. Hooper, who was master of the subject, and to him he would write.

Mr. Jeremiah Allen, a merchant of Boston, called on me about to same time. I inquired of him. He was able only to give such an hearsay account as I could give myself; but I desired him to write to Mr. White, at Nantes, which he undertook to do, and did. Mr. White answered Mr. Allen's letter by referring him to his answer to Mr. Williams, which Mr. Williams received and delivered to Dr. Franklin, who communicated it to us, and it contained a good account.

I desired Mr. Thaxter to write to Messrs. Ingraham and Bromfield and Mr. Storer to write to Captain Coffin, at Amsterdam. They delivered me the answers; both contained information, but Coffin's was the most particular and of the most importance, as he spoke as a witness. We made the best use of these letters with the English gentlemen, and they appeared to have a good deal of weight with them.

From first to last I ever insisted upon it with the English gentlemen that the fisheries and the Mississippi, if America was not satisfied in those points, would be the sure and certain sources of a future war, slowed them the indispensable necessity of both to our affairs, and that no treaty we could make which should be unsatisfactory to our people on those points could be observed; that the population near the Mississippi would be so rapid, and the necessities of the people for its navigation so pressing, that nothing could restrain them from going down, and if the force of arms should be necessary, it would not be wanting; that the fishery entered into our distilleries, our coasting trade, our trade with the southern States, with the West India islands, with the coast of Africa, and with every part of Europe in such a manner, and especially with England, that it could not be taken from us, or granted us stingily, without tearing and rending; that the other states had staples, we baid none but fish, no other means of remittances to London, or paying those very debts they had insisted upon so seriously; that if we were forced off, at three leagues distance, we should smuggle eternally, that their men-of-war might have the glory of sinking now and then a fishing schooner, but this would not prevent a repetition of the crime, it would only inform, and irritate, and enkindle a new war, that in seven years we should break through all restraints and conquer from them the Island of Newfoundland itself, and Nova Scotia too.

Mr. Fitzherbert always smiled, and said it was very extraordinary that the British ministry and we should see it in so different a light. That they meant the restriction in order to prevent disputes, and kill the seeds of war, and we should think it so certain a source of disputes, and so strong a seed of war; but that our reasons were such that he thought the probability of our side.

I have not time to minute the conversation about the sea-cow fishery, the whale fishery, the Magdalen Island, the Labrador coasts, and the coasts of Nova Scotia. It is sufficient to say, they were explained to the utmost of our knowledge and finally conceded.

I should have noted before the various deliberations between the English gentlemen and us, relative to the words "indefinite and exclusive" right, which the Count de Vergennes and M. Gerard had

the precaution to insert in our treaty with France. I observed often to the English gentlemen, that, aiming at excluding us from fishing upon the north side of Newfoundland, it was natural for them to wish that the English would exclude us from the south side. This would be making both alike, and take away an odious distinction. French statesmen must see the tendency of our fishermen being treated kindly and hospitably, like friends by the English on their side of the island, and unkindly inhospitably and like enemies on the French side. I added, further, that it was my opinion, neither our treaty with the French nor any treaty or clause to the same purpose which the English could make, would be punctually observed. Fishermen, both from England and America, would smuggle, especially the Americans in the early part of the spring, before the Europeans could arrive. This, therefore, must be connived by the French, or odious measures must be recurred to by them or us to suppress it, and in either case it was easy to see what would be the effect upon the American mind. Whey, no doubt, therefore, wished the English to put themselves upon as odious a footing at least as they had done.

Dr. Franklin said that there was great weight in this observation, and the Englishmen showed plainly enough that they felt it.

I have not attempted in these notes to do justice to the arguments of my colleagues, all of whom were throughout the whole business, when they attended, very attentive and very able, especially Mr. Jay, to whom the French, if they knew as much of his negotiations as they do of mine, would very justly give the title with which they have inconsiderately decorated me, that of "Le Washington de la negociation," a very flattering compliment, indeed, to which I have not a right, but sincerely think it belongs to Mr. Jay. ■

### *Source*

*The Revolutionay Correspondence of the United States*, Edited under the Direction of Congress by Francis Wharton, Volume VI. Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1889.

*The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy*, Yale Law School, Lillian-Goldman Law Library

[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/6wh90-3.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/6wh90-3.asp)